

Michael Sheridan
Far East Correspondent

ENDING years of mystery, a witness has been found to a secret Chinese operation to salvage a British submarine, HMS Poseidon, which sank off the northeast coast of China in 1931 after colliding with a steamship.

The man, a retired Chinese military officer, has told of seeing the hulk of the Poseidon near the port of Yantai in 1972 after Chinese naval engineers recovered it from the seabed 130ft down.

He described a gash in the hull, a tangle of rusted pipes and valves, metal surfaces encrusted with sea life and workmen swarming over the vessel, the last known resting place of 19 British submariners and one Chinese crewman lost in the disaster.

He was traced by the team behind a new film and a book that reveal hitherto unknown facts about the loss of the Poseidon.

The salvage operation was kept secret by the communist regime, then led by Mao Tse-tung. Naval experts believe the Chinese brought up the wreck to help designers and to test salvage techniques as they built their own submarine fleet.

Three years ago, prompted by an official request from Britain, the Chinese government finally admitted raising the submarine. But it claimed no detailed records of the operation could be traced.

Now a rough date can be put on it and questions will be raised about what happened to the remains of those who died aboard the Poseidon, which was considered to be a maritime grave by the Ministry of Defence.

In his account the retired officer, Colonel Shan Lin, hints that any remains were unceremoniously disposed of, saying: "The crude Chinese workers did not know how to treat the skeletons of seamen in the submarine kindly."

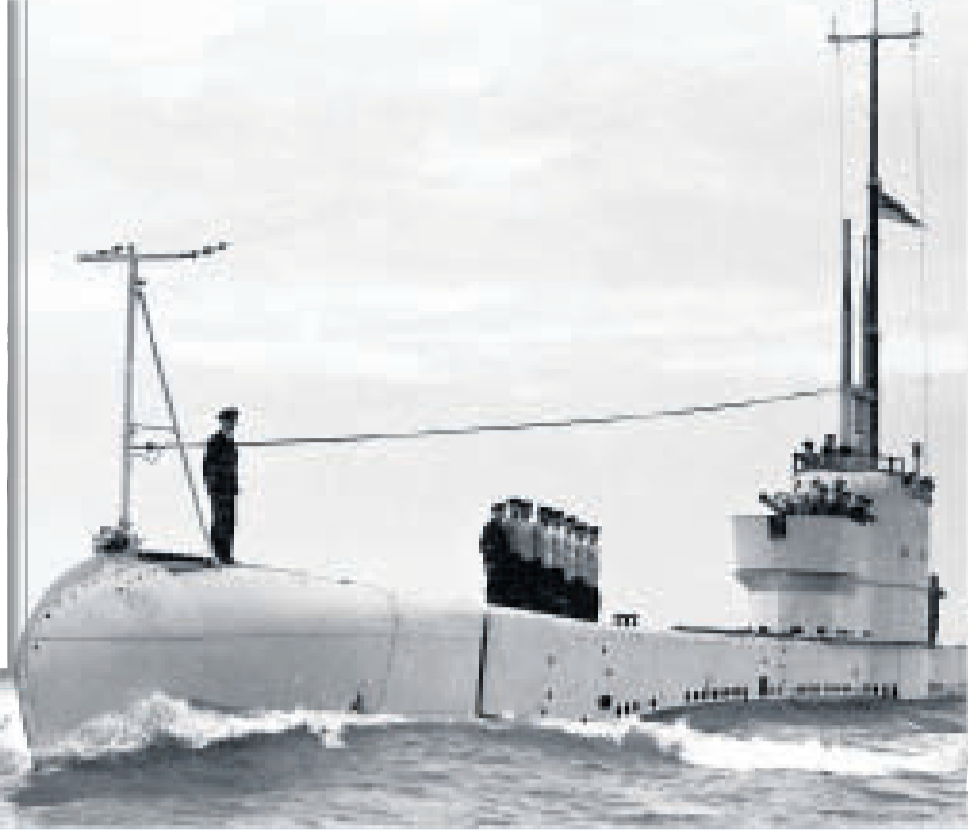
In July 1972 Shan was on holiday at the coast. He went swimming off the island of Zhifu, known in British admiralty records as Chefoo, and noticed the damaged submarine at the wharf operated by the local salvage bureau.

"Impelled by curiosity I swam to the island, where I saw the submarine was rusting away and there were gaping holes in the hull," Shan wrote.

"Inside I could see pipelines and valves covered in rust and encrusted with marine life.



Patrick Willis, centre, was lauded as a hero after the sinking of the Poseidon, right. Among the dead was Albert Winter, far right on his wedding day



Mao hijacked Poseidon adventure

A WITNESS HAS FINALLY REVEALED THE FATE OF A SUNKEN BRITISH SUBMARINE SECRETLY SALVAGED BY CHINA

Dock labourers were at work on it."

Shan asked the men what the strange vessel was. "They told me it was a British submarine and it sank off Yantai in the 1930s," he recorded.

The workers told him that "all the British devils had escaped but two Chinese seamen were left on board and died", a story contradicted by British naval records.

Shan, a well established military commentator with more than 4,500 specialist blog postings to his name, posted his story on several Chinese websites.

He was traced by Steven Schwankert, an American writer and diver who lives in Beijing and has made his quest for the Poseidon the subject of a forthcoming book.

"I thought this was going to be a simple point to find a

wreck and dive it," said Schwankert. "The discovery was that the history was not as it appears. To me that's the whole point of exploration."

A documentary following Schwankert's investigation, The Poseidon Project, made by the British film makers Arthur

and Luther Jones, is expected to be shown at festivals later this year. The team also managed to track down two Chinese engineers who were on the salvage operation but both refused to speak to them.

The sinking of HMS Poseidon during exercises on

June 9, 1931, was a national shock because it had been the most advanced submarine of its time.

It also became a celebrated example of valour by six men who escaped from the forward torpedo compartment using a pioneering breathing device

that revolutionised the way submariners could survive a disaster.

Thirty members of the crew had scrambled to safety as the submarine sank in less than four minutes but one later perished from inhaling oil; 21 died in all.

The hero of the escape, Petty Officer Patrick Willis, was lionised at home but Lieutenant-Commander Bernard Galpin, Poseidon's captain, was court-martialled.

The Poseidon was launched at Vickers-Armstrong in Barrow-in-Furness in 1929. It was one of six Parthian-class submarines built for the Royal Navy's China station, the guardian of Britain's interests in the Far East.

Its loss hit the headlines and inspired a feature film but was soon eclipsed by the Japanese invasion of China and the second world war. It became an obsession for Schwankert who combed through records, tramped around cemeteries and contacted British descendants of the crew.

"I understand now what drew Steven into the mystery of the submarine and its crew,"

said Arthur Jones. "I almost feel like I know the men and how they must have felt, trapped underwater for three hours in the dark."

Of the six Parthian-class submarines launched in the full glow of empire at the end of the 1920s, four were sunk in action during the second world war and one made it through the war to be scrapped at Troon in 1946.

Despite years of searches by Schwankert in scrapyards up and down the Chinese coast, nothing has been found of HMS Poseidon.

The film makers are seeking funds to complete the documentary: indiegogo.com/theposeidonproject.

The *Real Poseidon Adventure: China's Secret Salvage of Britain's Lost Submarine* by Steven Schwankert will be published next year by Hong Kong University Press

Chinese missile threatens US bases

China has tested a naval cruise missile that would enable its warships to strike American bases in northeast Asia, the latest sign of increasing military rivalry between the two giants, writes Michael Sheridan.

News of the test of the DH-10, similar to the Tomahawk cruise missiles used by America and Britain, emerged as tensions rose between China and Japan

over a handful of disputed islets. It was followed by reports that America is in talks with allies to put up a screen of anti-missile defences covering China's entire eastern coast, using new bases in Japan and, possibly, the Philippines.

Officials in Washington claim these would be aimed at countering the missile threat from North Korea, but China, which is involved in several disputes

along its coastline — from the oil- and gas-rich South China Sea to the archipelago linking Taiwan to Japan and the two Koreas — has already sounded a note of warning.

Extreme nationalists in China and Japan have stoked anger by staging theatrical landings on the islands just north of Taiwan, known as the Diaoyu by China and the Senkaku by Japan.

Poster girl Gandhi to revive party

Nicola Smith
Delhi

FOR years Priyanka Gandhi, the granddaughter of India's assassinated prime minister Indira Gandhi, has seemed the best hope of reviving the flagging political fortunes of the dynasty that has dominated Indian politics since independence in 1947.

The 40-year-old housewife, who draws huge crowds whenever she speaks, has spurned the hustings, preferring to stay at her luxurious home in Delhi's diplomatic quarter and bring up her son, Raihan, 12, and daughter, Miraya, 10.

That is about to change. Reports say Gandhi, whose father, Rajiv, was assassinated while he was prime minister in 1991, is about to plunge into politics in the hope of saving the ruling Indian Congress party from an electoral drubbing in the 2014 polls.

Priyanka, who is universally described as the most popular member of the Nehru-Gandhi family, has been given the task of revitalising the party in its Uttar Pradesh heartland where her mother, Sonia, holds her parliamentary seat. Last week she was reported to have set herself a three-month deadline to revamp Congress.

The party was left reeling earlier this year after it came fourth in state elections in Uttar Pradesh, which had been billed as a political litmus test for Rahul Gandhi, 42,

Sonia's eldest child, who has long been tipped as a future prime minister.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, is home to the Rae Bareilly and Amethi constituencies, which have been represented in parliament by Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister, his daughter, Indira, and grandson Rajiv.

According to the Mail Today newspaper, the party leadership has decided to play its "ultimate trump card" by sending Priyanka to prepare for the general election in two years' time.

Party sources claim she may fight the seat, replacing her mother who has recently undergone major surgery. "Sonia's loyalty to the Congress party is unquestioned and that's the reason she brought forward Rahul, but he hasn't delivered the goods. Priyanka can," said Chandra Prakash Bhambhri, a political analyst.

Despite being launched as the party's poster girl at key elections, Priyanka, who was 12 when Indira died and 19 when her father was killed by a suicide bomber, has hitherto declined all offers to take a central role in the party.

"I think there are many ways to serve people and I just don't feel the need to enter politics," she said in a 2009 interview. But she said earlier this year that she would enter active politics if asked to do so.



Priyanka Gandhi is far more popular than brother Rahul

Party leaders refused to comment on her future, but senior figures have called for the elevation of Priyanka, in whom they see a reflection of her popular grandmother, Indira, who led the country for four terms.

"Congress had no choice but

to return to the basics. Indira used to meet people from these constituencies at her New Delhi residence every day," said Ram Sewak Chaudhary, 65, a veteran party member.

Her cheerleaders argue that Priyanka could be the flagging party's saviour because her

charisma, charm and political skills make a sharp contrast to the wooden public appearances of her brother Rahul.

Last year newspapers seized on a cable contained in the WikiLeaks files, in which an American diplomat claimed as far back as 2007 that the party was pinning its hopes on Priyanka after a series of gaffes by her brother.

"Congress insiders complain that he is a neophyte who does not have what it takes to become prime minister," the cable stated.

"Their hopes have now shifted to yet another member of the Nehru dynasty, Rahul's sister, Priyanka, as they await her entry into politics."

Priyanka comes close to being worshipped by voters in the Rae Bareilly seat.

"When she gets down from her car and walks towards the people, you feel Indira Gandhi is standing in front of you," said Ghanshyam Pathak, a shopkeeper and Congress party supporter.

"She is the real inheritor of her grandmother and her father Rajiv Gandhi's legacy. She should definitely enter politics."

"She has been a very active player on the sidelines. She could stand for Rae Bareilly," agreed Mobashar Jawed Akbar, a political analyst and editorial director of India Today.

"But in India the electorate wants to discuss issues as much as personalities."

US drones kill two top militant leaders

Lucy Fisher

TWO Pakistan-based militant commanders said to be responsible for some of the most serious attacks on coalition forces in Afghanistan have been reported killed in a series of US drone strikes.

Badruddin Haqqani, operational commander of the Haqqani network, which is closely allied to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda

terrorists, was said to have been one of 18 people killed in a volley of attacks against bases in Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal area.

He was second-in-command of the network and was said to have directed last year's attack on the Intercontinental hotel in Kabul, one of the militants' most audacious operations that left 21 people, including several attackers, dead.

North Waziristan and surrounding tribal areas are

the base for Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups who operate on both sides of the border.

US and Pakistani officials could not confirm Haqqani's death yesterday, but one of his relatives said he had been killed. Confirmation of casualties from drone strikes in such remote areas often takes weeks. A series of drone attacks last week suggested that the CIA was in pursuit of an important suspect.

In a strike in Afghanistan's Kunar province, Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban leader in Pakistan's Bajaur tribal area, and his deputy were among 12 militants killed, said a spokesman for the Nato-led coalition in Afghanistan.

Dadullah was responsible for the smuggling of fighters and weapons across the porous Afghan border as well as attacks on coalition forces.

A spokesman for the

Pakistani Taliban confirmed that Dadullah had been killed in a drone strike and said Maulana Abu Bakar has been named as the new chief of the Bajaur region.

Militant hideouts along the Afghan-Pakistan border have been a source of tension for both governments as well as for the coalition. Pakistan and Afghanistan accuse each other of not doing enough to expel pro-Taliban factions.



Breivik has received hundreds of letters and is setting up a think tank from his cell

Breivik dodges blog ban to spread hate from jail

Bojan Pancevski

THE Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who was jailed for 21 years last week for killing 77 people, is exploiting liberal prison regulations to spread his racist views.

The 33-year-old admitted planting a bomb that killed eight people in central Oslo and shooting 69, mainly teenagers, at a youth camp on Utøya island, but claimed his actions were "necessary" to stop the Islamisation of Norway and Europe.

He was found to be sane by an Oslo court in a judgment that in effect sentences him to life imprisonment.

But as a jubilant Breivik gave a far right salute and told the court he regretted not having murdered more people, it emerged that he has been writing a blog from his cell even though he is banned from using the internet.

He is allowed to correspond by post with like-minded extremists who immediately place the contents on right-wing websites.

A spokesman for the Ila prison, where Breivik is serving his sentence, confirmed that he had received more than 600 letters and was engaged in an intense correspondence with

extremists in Norway and abroad.

Prisoners in Norway retain the right to vote in elections and are allowed to correspond with the outside world as long as they are not inciting violence or criminality, something Breivik has been careful to avoid in wording his letters.

Breivik is also working on setting up a think tank he calls Conservative Revolutionary Movement. "My goal is to develop a pan-European prison network consisting of patriotic martyrs and other politically motivated prisoners," he wrote to a Russian follower.

Breivik's lawyers also announced that he was working on three books: an autobiography including a detailed description of how he planned and executed his attack, a second outlining his ideological views, and a third on the future of Europe.

Breivik, a secondary school dropout who was jobless and lived with his mother at the time of the murders, initially told the court he was unemployed but has now asked for his profession to be amended to "writer".

The Ila prison offers inmates access to university-level courses and he has already demanded to study political

science. Its facilities include a library and a gym and inmates are allowed to work making furniture, hats and gloves.

At present Breivik is kept in isolation in a spacious cell that includes a bedroom with an ensuite bathroom, an office with a computer and a printer and a workout room with a treadmill. His computer has no link to the internet but the prison authorities installed an offline version of Wikipedia.

Prison officials said that they considered isolation to be "torture" and that they aimed to integrate Breivik into prison life.

Ellen Bjercke, a prison spokeswoman, said: "He has human rights. This is about creating a humane regime."

But commentators have argued that Breivik will continue to receive what he always wanted: a platform to spread his racist ideology.

Asne Seierstad, who is writing a book on Breivik's crime, said he should no longer be allowed to spread his views from his cell. "Is his signature on a political statement a call to violence in itself, and thus illegal, or is it his right to freedom of speech that should prevail?" she asked. "The question is whether Norway allows him to be heard from his cell."

HEIKO JUNGE

AFP